

**Charter School Planning Phase Grant Application  
Monterey County Office of Education  
Home Independent Study**

**LEA: Monterey County Office of Education  
CDS CODE 27 10272**

**ABSTRACT OF APPLICATION**

The Monterey County Office of Education offers a Home Independent Study option for families that wish a “homeschooling” approach in the endeavor to educate their children. In an effort to enrich this option the teachers and parents have been entertaining the idea of a charter. After investigating the charter school option it has become apparent that with Charter School status we would be able to further develop and reach the goals of our strong philosophy of parent and community involvement as a dominant force in a successful educational option for students in Monterey County. We have been thoughtfully addressing the idea of formulating a charter school for many months but it was only recently that our County Office has officially agreed to fully support us as our authorized public charter agency. A planning grant would allow us to formally implement our ideas by compensating teachers to prepare and work with parents on the formation of a charter school, enlist the expertise of various professionals to help us understand and formulate a charter that would meet the expectations of the community, visit existing charter schools, and hire an experienced writer to gather our ideas and properly express them in a professional and comprehensive charter.

We will concentrate on developing a charter that will allow us to fine tune the elements of our program that have proven to be educationally sound. We wish to focus on the areas that we need to improve such as student assessment, technology, and community involvement. We also would like to restructure our program to meet the growing needs of our families.

About 1.5 million students in the United States are homeschooled, according to the Home Education Research Institute compared to about 300,000 students in 1990. These figures alone prove the growing interest in home-based, parent-involved educational programs. We offer the families in our community an organized, credible homeschooling option and by achieving charter status we will be able to continue to offer them a viable and better option.

Fiscal assistance would make the difference as to the quantity of time and the quality of thought that we can put into developing a charter worthy of approval and operation.

## **Elements of the Application**

### **I. The Charter School's Educational Vision**

#### **A. Baseline Information**

In 1987, the Monterey County Office of Education launched a Home Independent Study Program based on three requests received from interested families. First, they wished to have home visits with their assigned resource teacher. Second, they wanted to be provided with state adopted texts. And, third, they asked if we would organize and present on-going programs, workshops and field trips for them and their children.

We adopted a philosophy of service to the families that would respect their wishes in regards to educating and working with their children, but would also allow us to monitor and promote an educationally sound environment for each individual child that would meet his/her individual needs, educational interests and learning styles.

We started out that year with seven students and one credentialed resource teacher. We have grown to around 300 students and 20 credentialed resource teachers in a K-12 program that contracts with 15 school districts in Monterey and San Benito counties. The success of the program can be attributed to the fact that we have maintained our original philosophy and continue to deliver to the families the program elements that they originally requested.

The students who are served and who will be served by this program live in diverse communities throughout Monterey County. Many live in Salinas, a growing county seat of 128,000 people, by far the largest town in this large rural county. Other students live in smaller residential towns like Prunedale (7,500), Castroville (5,700), Monterey (33,700) Marina (28,000), Pacific Grove (17,400), Carmel (4,564), Del Rey Oaks (1,697). Still others live in farming towns of various sizes such as Gonzales (6,600), Soledad (22,882), King City (10,510). Some live in isolated unincorporated areas 30 to 40 miles away from the nearest town. Overall, Monterey County's population is about 50% Anglo, 20% Latino and 10% Asian, African American or other.

Our families come from all over Monterey County and a portion of San Benito County. Our resource teachers travel to the homes, unless otherwise requested, traveling from our site at the Monterey County Office of Education in Salinas to distances as far away to the south as San Ardo (60 miles), to the east to the city of Hollister (45 miles) and to the west covering all of the Monterey Peninsula (25 miles).

Families enter our program after they have been informed about the commitment and responsibility involved in taking on the important job of educating their children. We respect our parents as we have learned over the years that parents, with professional guidance, can make the

best teachers of their children. They are creative and motivated and tend to instill in their children their love and enthusiasm for education.

We have also watched our program grow from a fledgling “homeschooling” approach involving only a few families to a cooperative program that involves not only the parent and resource teacher but the entire community in an effort to educate the student. We find that this effort not only positively influences the education of the student but also enriches the entire spirit of the person in a wholesome productive way.

Our home visits are unique, no two being alike, as are the students we serve. Our teachers design assignments that are specific to the individual needs of the student. The parents then creatively and thoughtfully carry out the plan with their children each day giving each child individual educational attention. We provide all the state-adopted textbooks for the student as well as supplementary materials such as those that would be provided in the classroom. The parents receive professional teaching advice at each visit and the student gains the attention of the resource teacher.

We also organize on-going programs, field trips and workshops for our families. This allows us to not only enrich our students with outside activities, but it allows the students and their families to interact and socialize. We encourage the use of the community. We work cooperatively with our local Lyceum group and our community colleges.

Our families come from all backgrounds. We serve affluent as well as homeless. We have all races and nationalities. The only common thread that links our families is that they desire to educate their children in their own homes and have as much control over that education as they can legally have.

Academically we serve the student who may be advanced and desires a more challenging program, the student who has fallen behind in school and needs individual help, or the student whose learning styles may not be met in the traditional classroom setting.

## **B. Educational Vision**

Our vision has been a dream for the future. Now that charter school status may be close at hand the anticipation of the reality of this dream brings excitement, re-dedication and a tremendous spark of enthusiasm to all who are associated with our program. It allows us an opportunity not only to continue with a program that we feel has had great legitimacy and potential but to renovate it and add to it and make it better!

*“In an atmosphere of trust, respect and fairness, participants in the Monterey County Office of Education Home Independent Study Program have the freedom to individualize a program of education with the leadership and support of an experienced resource team. Students, parents, and teachers share responsibility for achievement of educational goals.”*

The preceding mission statement encompasses what is special, unique, and necessary in our program. We *share responsibility* educating our children with the people that have the greatest concern for these children - their parents. According to a study entitled *Home Schooling: An Overview for Education Policymakers* (by Patricia M. Lines), published by the U.S. Department of Education, parents are dedicated to their children's education and are willing to put in the time it takes to prepare and deliver the lessons. John Holt, a favorite author of many who homeschool, believes that children and families are unique, with their own interests, strengths and challenges and by encouraging families to develop these areas the child will flourish. Elizabeth Jones and Selma Wasserman state in their play theory that children and families approach education joyfully, actively engaged in learning and the search for meaning. The child also realizes that he has a responsibility for his own education and agrees to cooperatively work with his parent and resource teacher toward his educational goals.

Our program is indeed unique and we wish to maintain the policies and opportunities that have made us so desirable to the families we serve. We will not release or abandon our founding philosophy. But we feel this is the time and the opportunity to offer more of what we already do and also address suggestions for improvement coming from families we serve.

We also feel the need to reach out to another ever-growing population that has been knocking at our door - the at-risk student. These students do not seem to have an educational option other than a classroom option where they tend to fail because of peer or academic pressure. Although we have been trying to serve this type of student we don't feel we have had the resources nor the flexibility to do it adequately.

The following are visions we have for improving our program:

- Acquire a larger facility to enable us to provide more workshops involving such things as math classes, art and science enrichment, writing skills enhancement, and PE activities.
- Provide an opportunity for students to attend tutoring sessions with a qualified expert in each subject area.
- Concentrate on additional workshops that would enhance our parents' ability to teach their children at home.
- Continue to network with community services but on a larger scale.
- Revise our parent and teacher handbooks.

The following are visions we have to meet the growing needs of our program:

- Address the needs of the at-risk population who are searching for an option other than the traditional classroom situation.
- Compile a thoughtful set of standards and assessments for accountability based upon and at least as rigorous as the California subject matter standards.

- Connect with the technology department at MCOE in an effort to provide up-to-date resources, computers, web-sites, and distance learning for our students.
- Add a foreign language component engaging a tutor to work at our site to meet the needs of a student whose parent is not fluent in the foreign language.
- Arrange for art, music and PE classes in the community to assist parents who may not have the skills to teach these at home.
- Conscientiously examine science materials in the hope of purchasing lab equipment suitable for home use.
- Develop a pamphlet describing the elements and benefits of our Charter School for distribution upon inquiry, at libraries and appropriate public places.

In summary, the Monterey County Office of Education Home Independent Study Program is committed to offering an option that allows optimum parent input, collaboration and involvement. This is a truly unique form of public education. Traditional classroom education may be a wonderful opportunity for most students, but for those who may not respond well to classroom criteria or may need more one-to-one attention our program uniquely serves their needs. We also can offer an organized educational alternative for those families who are simply dedicated to the idea of “homeschooling”.

## **II. Grant Project Goals and Activities for Approval of a Charter Proposal**

### **A. Grant Project Goals and Objectives**

Our goal at the end of this project will be that our committee of teachers, office staff, parents and administrators will all have cooperatively worked together to unite their ideas and visions into a charter school petition in accordance with Senate Bill 1448 incorporating the 14 basic elements of a Charter School. And as a result of this joint effort we will have a charter school that will allow us to continue the unique program we have in an exemplary way as well as address and meet the growing needs of the community we serve.

The following individuals will be the key motivators in completing the planning and writing stages of this process:

Mary Kay Sgheiza, Program Consultant , MCOE Home Independent Study

Barbara Bingaman, Resource Teacher, MCOE Home Independent Study

Janet Asiain, Resource Teacher, MCOE Home Independent Study

## **B. Identification of Planning Needs for the Development of an Effective School**

### **1. Educational Capacity**

Individual attention and assessment have always been fundamental in our program.

Individual progress is determined by teacher observation of each student during weekly visits. Each teacher constructs a work sample file that shows on-going progress. While this will remain central to our student assessment and evaluation system, we are working towards adopting a second means of assessment. This will be a focus of our planning stage with a committee deciding a second form of evaluation in addition to STAR tests which are administered to each student on site in April/May of each year.

Students are enrolled in our program in the grade level appropriate to their age, unless otherwise agreed upon with the parent, but are given assignments and goals related to their skill levels. Each child is assessed upon entering the program, either formally using placement tests provided by the publisher of each textbook, or informally by the resource teacher assigned.

We would like to create other assessment methods to provide a wide base of benchmark measures representative of the diversity in our population. We would like these to be reflective of student performance by using authentic and standard-based assessment systems.

### **2. Business & Organizational Structure**

Our Charter School will retain the same relationship with the Monterey County Superintendent of Schools and the Monterey County Board of Education regarding legal authority, governance and fiscal accountability as is now held by the Home Independent Study Program.

An annual balanced budget for the charter school will be presented for County Board approval each year. MCOE will conduct the financial operations through established procedures and follow its business plan. The business office will be responsible for (but not limited to) payroll, insurance, contracts, audits, and other related fiscal matters. The MCOE has extensive experience in business and organizational management. Day-to-day operational decisions will be made by the charter school program consultant, and an Advisory Council composed of teachers, parents and administrators will be established to address program questions and concerns regarding the operations and improvement of the school.

We plan to stay at our same site at the Monterey County Office of Education. It is centrally located to all we serve and is a known meeting area buzzing with educational opportunities. In November of 1999, we hope to move into a larger facility at the same site. At the present time we are in the Alternative Programs office which is the hub for all Alternative Education, including the business of the Court Schools, Community Schools and Truancy. The facility is far too small for the population we serve and the space is rightly needed by the Alternative Programs Director.

Our new space will allow us to serve our clientele more efficiently and would provide a more adequate space for student in-take, orientation and conferences as well as a meeting room for our many workshops.

### **3. Collaboration and Networking Strategies**

We are looking forward to involving a strategic planner in the writing of the charter. We will involve our teachers, our parents, our office staff, our administrators, and the community.

We have twenty credentialed teachers, some who have been with the program since its inception and others who have joined us in the last three or four years. They choose to work with the program because of its uniqueness and the population it serves. They all work hard for the program putting in extra hours as necessary and demonstrate that they have a vested interest in the operation. We have always been proud of the fact that our program has been successful because of collaboration among teacher and parents. We have a mandatory weekly staff meeting that involves all twenty teachers and the program consultant. Ideas, concerns and accomplishments are always discussed at those meetings and joint decisions are made.

Parents choose this program and therefore have a great commitment in watching it flourish. Their input has always been worthwhile and creative as well as respected and we are thrilled to include them in the formation of this charter. A letter will be sent out to our parents inviting them to join a committee for the formulation of a charter.

Our office staff sets the tone when the family first makes contact either by phone or in person. Our staff is sensitive to the needs of “homeschoolers” and knowledgeable as to the proper information to give on first inquiry. Our secretary, is extremely knowledgeable as to the paperwork trail and will be included in decision making.

Paula Mitchell, Alternative Programs Director, has been very supportive in our wish to start a charter. She was instrumental in convincing the administration to back us in this effort. She will continue to be a resource and support to us.

Our community is also supportive of any “homeschooling” effort. We do and will continue to collaborate with Hartnell College, Monterey Peninsula College, the local Lyceum organization, libraries, adult school programs such as the Toy Lending Library, Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital, Ariel Theatrical Productions, Monterey County Symphony and local news media.

### **4. Program Evaluation**

Each year, in May, we distribute a parent survey with questions relating to the operation of our program covering the following:

1. Resource teacher support
2. Administration support
3. Office staff
4. Textbook and resource appropriateness
5. Assessment tools
6. Program, field trip & workshop evaluation
7. Suggestions for improvements of the program

The teachers and the office staff participate in a peer audit every April in which they actively participate to achieve the following:

1. Check the accuracy of their cumulative and work sample files
2. Discuss the successes and failures of the year's activities
3. Openly suggest ways for improving the program

The teachers also submit a confidential written survey to the Program Consultant to address their areas of concern and suggestions for program improvement.

As we prepare and plan for charter status we will be including a program assessment survey for families who leave the program to ascertain if there was any dissatisfaction with the program.

## **C. Support for Getting the Charter Petition Circulated and Approved**

### **1. Specific Activities/Work to be Done**

We are fortunate in that we have already been in existence and have had an exemplary program for twelve years so that much of the work required in meeting the 14 elements has already been achieved.

As we prepare for the charter during this planning stage, and hopefully with the assistance of a planning grant, we will be able to focus on the understanding and wording of each of the 14 elements. We will need to elicit the help and tap the knowledge of others who are operating successful charters. We will need to request the assistance of an experienced charter writer who will be familiar with charter schools and equip us with strategies that will increase our potential for creating a powerful charter school.

We already have a base of students and expect that, with the knowledge that we are enriching our program through a charter, most will return. We intend to notify other prospective students through the media, through pamphlets that will be distributed upon inquiry or made available at appropriate public places, and by word of mouth.

### **2. Justification for Use of Grant Funds**



At the present time our teachers are paid at an hourly rate. In order to compensate them for the time and effort that it will take to thoroughly understand and meet all the 14 elements of the charter, we will need to solicit their time and energy. Even though many are willing to do this without compensation, we feel that compensation would guarantee that it would be accomplished and allow us to properly achieve our educational vision.

The daily operation of our existing program completely consumes the time of all charter school motivators. Our director is encouraging us to set this in motion by the fall of 1999 and she would like to be able to present our completed charter document to our board by June. In order to do a proper and exemplary job we would need the assistance of a professional consultant. The grant money would allow us to hire such a person to write the school charter as well as an implementation grant.

It would also allow funds for travel to visit the sites of existing and successful charter schools. We feel this must be a priority as experience is the best teacher.

Funds will also be used for secretarial expenses as paperwork will need to be done before the implementation phase begins.

### **III. Self-Assessment and Procedures for Monitoring Progress Towards Completion of Charter Proposal**

As I have stated previously, teachers, staff and parents have been discussing the benefits and possibilities of a charter school for quite some time. It was formally suggested to our Administration in January, 1999 and now that they have investigated and digested it from a county office's perspective they alerted us this week that they would fully support it and would like us to try to implement it as soon as possible. They have indicated that it is a priority! To say the least we were thrilled!

With the above in mind, it is obvious that the commitment is serious and intense. We are in the process at this time of reviewing other similar county office charters, hiring a professional who with his/her expertise will ensure that we will meet all of the requirements of the charter.

#### **TIMELINE**

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| March 1999 | -Apply for Planning Grant   |
|            | -Inform teachers/parents of the intention                           |
|            | -Organize teacher/parent committees                                 |
|            | -Hire a consultant for charter grant & implementation grant writing |
|            | -Choose charter schools for visitation purposes                     |
| April 1999 | -Review successful charters   |
|            | -Meet with consultant for guidance and information                  |

- May 1999                    -Attend any workshops that will help with the implementation of our visions such as Standards & Assessment  
                                     -Work with consultant toward the implementation of visions and goals
- June 1999                    -Share charter with parents and teachers for review and public comment  
                                     -Submit charter to County Board of Education for approval  
                                     -Hire teachers to work during June, July and August on visions for implementation at the start of school term
- July 1999                    -Interview/hire any additional staff that may be needed  
                                     -Order science equipment/books/materials needed to implement visions
- August 1999                    -Contact local media to share charter concept with the public and solicit additional students  
                                     -Prepare for the opening of the school year
- November 1999                    -Move into a larger facility